



For more information on this topic, visit Ecology's Web site at:  
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/ws/wtrsuply.html>.

# Frequently Asked Questions about Water Supply in Washington: Update for the End of Summer 2006

From Ecology's Water Resources Program

**Q: It has not rained for some time; is our state's water supply okay?**

**A:** This is historically the time of year when rivers and streams are at their lowest and human demand for water is at its highest. We were fortunate that we had an above average snow pack this past winter, which has really helped us through the summer. However, a dryer than normal summer and above normal summer temperatures has caused mild drought conditions in some areas of the state. A few areas are worse off than others. This is to be expected, and is fairly typical for this time of year. It appears that most watersheds have adequate water supplies to last until the fall rains arrive.

**Q: Is our state in a drought emergency, like last year?**

**A:** No. Mild drought and drought emergencies are not the same. The law defines a drought emergency as when water supplies are less than 75% of normal, which is resulting in undue hardship.

While much of the state may be experiencing a mild drought, most areas do not meet the level for declaring a statewide drought emergency. Some isolated areas of the state, however, are experiencing drought emergency conditions. On the Makah Indian Reservation, the reservoir that supplies water to the reservation and the town of Neah Bay is nearly empty because the source stream, Educk Creek, is nearly dry.

The Makah Nation declared an emergency last week, put in place extraordinary restrictions on water use and has brought on line two new wells using temporary power sources. A portable desalination unit (a device which turns ocean water into drinking water) is being shipped to the reservation by the Federal government as a back-up source of supply if the wells fail to produce sufficient water. These conditions are causing undue economic hardship for the tribe and the town of Neah Bay.

**Q: What is Ecology Doing?**

**A:** Governor Christine Gregoire authorized the Department of Ecology (Ecology) to declare a drought emergency for the northwest Olympic Peninsula, (known as Water Inventory Areas 19 and 20). Ecology Director Jay Manning then signed an Order and Determination declaring a drought emergency from just west of Port Angeles to Cape Flattery, encompassing Neah Bay and the Makah Indian Reservation on September 11, 2006. This order is effective immediately and shall remain in effect through December 31, 2006, unless terminated prior to that date.



## **Q: What Else is Ecology Doing?**

**A:** We are also monitoring streams and rivers throughout the state. According to the USGS measurements, about half of Washington streams and rivers are at or below normal levels for this time of year.

“First in use, first in right” is the basis for Washington water law. Early established, more “senior,” water uses have a right to their full measure of water before later, “junior” water rights may use any water. This is also true in areas where “instream flow” rules have been adopted. Instream flow rules create a water right for the stream. In most cases, when stream flows drop below protected levels, junior water users must stop use.

In late summer and early fall, it is not unusual for junior water rights holders to have to check with Ecology to see if they can use water. For the rest of the summer, junior water right holders on the Little Spokane River must check in with us before irrigating. In Central Washington, orders went out in early August for the Methow and Okanogan rivers, and a few weeks ago for the Wenatchee River. Ecology has a stream flow hotline for water users to find out when they can use water.

## **Q: What can I do?**

**A:** Citizens should pay attention to messages from their local water supplier. They should supply information on water supply conditions and whether or not there are any water use restrictions in your community. Typically this time of year some areas are worse off than others and some areas may not experience any difficulties.

Regardless of the weather conditions, it is always wise to conserve precious water whenever possible. Here are some things you can do in your home:

- Take shorter showers.
- Don't let the water run when you are shaving, brushing your teeth, or hand washing dishes.
- Make sure you have a full load before starting a washing machine or dishwasher.
- Convert to water efficient toilets, faucets, and showerheads.
- Water your lawn early in the morning or later in the evening (or consider letting it go brown—it will turn green in a couple of months).
- Convert to low water landscaping.
- Use drip irrigation for plants, shrubs, and trees.
- Limit the water you use to irrigate your lawn and garden to approximately one inch per week—including rainfall. For best results, moisten the soil between four and six inches deep with each watering.
- Check Ecology's website for more water conservation ideas at:  
**<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/ws/wtrcnsv.html>**.

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